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THE LITTLE CITY

BY

WILFRED ROWLAND CHILDE.

Oxford

B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD STREET

London

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL & CO., LIMITED

—
1911

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FOREWORD:

A SONG OF THE LITTLE CITY.

*AT intervals of tunes
And under lonely towers,
Where silences of noons
Cover their secret flowers,
In places no one knows,
Where winding ways go down,
In the dim heart of a rose,
I find the Little Town.*

*When my soul wearieth
Of cities proud and great,
Whose skies are dark as death,
But gold is in their gate:
When my soul sorry is
For ships of great renown,
And rich men's palaces,
I seek the Little Town.*

*Upon a hill it stands,
Built up with quiet walls,
Guarding inviolate lands,
A place of festivals,
A place of happy bells,
Where comes no earthly one,
Beyond the heavens and hells,
Between the moon and sun.*

*Between the moon and sun,
Far, far beyond the stars,
Where comes not any one,
Nor roll the great world's cars,
With an angel all day through,
That wears a golden crown,
And is robed in red and blue,
I find the Little Town.*

*Fountains are playing there,
And children dance all day,
Who are far lovelier
Than any fabled fay,
And in their festivals
Far, far away behold,
From the high carven walls,
Dim mountains made of gold.*

*And high above it all,
With arches rich and fine,
A minster towering tall
Proclaims the place divine :
Where none to veil Him be,
And the birds of Eden sing,
I find the lord of me,
The Little City's King.*

A BALLAD OF ROLAND.

OUT of Blye Lord Roland came,
Came to seek the vale of Ys,
With fierce lips, and lids aflame,
And his bright sword Flórimys.

Fifty peers around him rode—
Robert Vals from high Laferre,
Gray Duke Ban from Ardenwode,
Black Jehan of Finisterre ;

Etienne from the lonely heights,
And Renault the warrior-boy,
In the midst of galloping knights,
Followed him aflare with joy.

There was Michael of Senant,
Lusty lord of river-lands,
And the Bishop Barlehan,
Lifting consecrated hands.

These there were that rode beside,
Princes of the happy towns,
Having bodies sanctified,
And their helms above their crowns.

So they shone, and so they rode,
Girding royal Roland round,
Till they came to steep abode
Of the dog divine Mahound.

Fell the tower before a prayer
From the lips of Barlehan,
And the army passed by there,
Passed by every christom man.

Soon before their eyes below
Lay the pleasant vale of Ys.
“Now,” said Roland, “let us go,
Trusting God and Florimys.”

THE LAST CLOUD.

THE great cloud burns and flushes
With last light of the sun ;
Flame all the upland bushes
In benediction ;
Mounts high the cloud and higher,
Shows towers and towns of snow,
Aflare with thrilling fire,
And like a rose below.
The earth becomes a lily,
And droops in lakes of light ;
All mountainous and hilly
The cloud goes towering bright.
It crowds its ports with lovers,
And ships of shining sail :
Then sudden darkness covers
The rapt and rosy vale.

THE ROSE OF DREAMS.

STRANGE songs the spirit sings
In darkened rooms,
And strange florescent things
Put forth their blooms.

Slowly to dying strains
Dim buds uncloset
Royal with sanguine stains
The dreaming Rose.

A wise and dreaming Rose
Her soul unbared,
Her secret does uncloset
To glimmering airs.

Strange songs the spirit sings
In darkened rooms,
And strange florescent things
Put forth their blooms.

THE HAREBELL.

A SUBTLE song of elfin things
She flutes the long, blue afternoon,
A sound of sweet imaginings,
A tune linked to another tune :
Upon the water-haunted moors
Nodding, she opens sapphire doors,
That bar the other land from me,
The lamp-lit leas of faëry.

She shakes her windy bells to the sun,
With tremblings and divine despairs,
Beholding antic fairies run
Upon the silence of the airs :
For her the opal moon uplifts
A torch above the misty drifts :
Upon the upland gardens drawn
She sees the poms of eve and dawn.

Yea, there are many things she sees,
Which tongue of man can never tell :

For there are visions in the trees,
That echo to her ringing bell,
And in bare pools, when on the hill
The yellow morning settles still,
The faces that she sees therein
Know nought of any mortal sin.

She is the spirit of the wild,
A player on fantastic lutes,
A mountain-girl, an upland-child,
Born where the song of silence flutes :
Lo, if thou darest to kiss her lips,
At midnight, in the moon's eclipse,
Then sapphire doors shall open thee
The lamp-lit leas of faëry.

THE FAIRY TOWN.

(*For C. M. H. P.*)

I FOUND a flower upon the hills,
Its face the colour of the sun ;
Its shape was like to daffodils,
But its beauty like to blossom none.
I set it safe within my breast,
And a fairy led me on the quest.

I saw a little, wallèd town,
That climbed against the open sun :
Its ancient streets went down and down,
And twisted, twisted every one :
High up above without a cause
Clamoured the ravens and the daws.

Red, red the pointed roofs of it,
And high behind the spires and towers
A climbing rosy cloud did sit,
Composed of ivory and flowers :
On valleys far behind was mist
Of opal and of amethyst.

A church of golden masonries,
And windows made of chrysopras,
And fretted arch-embroideries,
Above the smoking houses was :
Like lace the carven, flying stone
Over the wide world set alone.

Strange faces round about it were
Of devils and angelicals :
Its arches were far statelier
Than King Bladorlan's lofty walls ;
And the silver bells of the spiry house
Rang out with a noise melodious.

Right up the little streets went I :
The city's queen I wooed and won—
The lady called Tithellemy,
Fairest of all beneath the sun :
And now I wear a golden crown,
And rule the little, wallèd town.

SOUL'S HOLIDAY.

(For the Three Companions.)

BETWEEN high banks of flowering gold
The winding flood went by,
Spreading its waters clear and cold
Under a stainless sky.

We had left the spires, we had left the towers
And the dusty noise of the street,
We dabbled in white water-flowers
Our free and careless feet.

There was a little pipe to play
Small airs Arcadian,
And we skipped like lambs on a holiday
In a field apart from man.

We kissed the river-god's subtle daughters,
We spoke to them every one,
We trailed our feet in the crystal waters
And washed our souls in the sun.

THE SPLENDID ROAD.

WISER was he than the King Solomon,
Blue were his eyes and deeper than deep wells,
He walked upon the open road, alone,
And from the dim south came a sound of bells.
A pilgrim's staff within his hand there was,
With fair, fine scarlet was he clad upon,
Walking, he dreamed of builded chrysopras,
And of that place, where on a regent throne
The white rose of celestial virgins is,
Mary, God's Mother, and his mother too,
Midmost of those translunar palaces.
Wiser was he than the King Solomon,
That walked to Walsingham under the blue,
Dreaming of Syon, on the road alone.

MAY MORNING.

BENEATH the gray advance of day
In dreams the builded City lay :
Veiled all her spires and palaces,
And veiled the splendour of her towers,
The dew upon her starry flowers,
Her dim and many-coloured leas,
And veiled the coming of the Sun.

O magic-minded Middle Age !
Most strange it was to do a thing,
Whence comes there not to any one
The increase of his heritage,
Nor riches for his strengthening,
To mount upon a tower and sing,
And with a chaunted mystery
Salute the dim and sovran East,
Uplifting music like a feast
Above the City loved of thee :
Yea, very wonderful it was,
O crowned with amber and chrysopras,
To meet the Dawn with litany.

MIDMOST JUNE.

(*For E. H. W. M.*)

ALL through the hot, gray, sleepy afternoon
The thin gnats flew and sang,
The gardens of dim spices were aswoon,
And the earth was faint, and the sun like a pale moon,
And the sweet air rang.

Poppy and peony, larkspur, lily, rose
Nodded and fell asleep,
That the dull bees upon their lips might doze,
No petals to the warm air dared uncloze,
And the trees did weep.

From off the misty plots of tasselled flowers,
And the lawns and endless leas,
And all the drooping, sleep-entangled bowers,
A steam went up through the long, blue, lagging hours,
And there was no breeze.

TURRIS EBURNEA :
A SONG
OF
GOD'S FOOL THE MYSTIC.

My soul is like a fencèd tower,
And holds a secret room :
I hide me in it many an hour
Amid its dim perfume :
I have my holy bloom,
The Rose of Heaven in flower :
I hold my inner bower
In strait and dreaming gloom,
My soul my fencèd tower.

The Rose of soil angelical,
That shines not over earth,
I have its buds and petals all,
Inestimable of worth,
Its blood-red calyces
Dyed with the wine of God,
Roots earthy from that sod,

Which dew in Syon bless,
And leaves of loveliness.

Its radiant heart unfolds to me,
Its starry soul is plain
In glimmering felicity,
Dyed deep with love and pain :
And while my glad eyes gaze
Upon its petalled crown,
I hear a song come down
With thanksgiving and praise
Of the celestial town.

The moon, that torch Dianian,
Dreams ever paganly :
But I am only a simple man
In a white tower by the sea :
There comes a liturgy,
Even for a little span,
Great voices Christian,
Songs of my Lord to me,
To me, a simple man.

A tower of ivory it is
Beside a shoreless sea :
I look out of my lattices
And the saints appear to me,

A singing company
From heaven's high palaces,
Chaunting their litanies:
White luting Cecily
Their first choir-maiden is.

The sea-wave crashes in my ears ;
Again their viols cease :
I have been here for endless years,
And the room is full of peace.
Dim-sliding harmonies
And dreaming voice of seers
Come past all barriers :
With God I have no fears,
And round me roll His seas.

THE CHAINED CRUSADER.

(*For C. M. D.*)

BETWEEN the joustings and the wine
I heard a voice descend :
“ Ye kneel and hail Me as divine ;
Therefore My land defend.
The infidel has hold upon
The cedarn slopes of Lebanon :
The faithless rule and keep their stand
In the gates of holy land.
None of your paladins makes stir
To stand and keep My sepulchre,
Or bring My cities back to Me.
Once wept I for Jerusalem :
Now is she tenanted by them,
That speak against My mystery.”

Between the viols and the wine
A voice came to my ears :
“ Ye shall take back My Palestine
Through many barriers :
Ye shall attain, though many a thorn
Be in your bodies driven,

Through battle and strong suns and scorn,
Unto the Rose of Heaven.
Yea, that small seed-plot of My birth
Ye shall possess once more,
That strange most holy space of earth—
Put by your music and your mirth,
And with your swords adore.
The infidel has hold upon
The cedarn slopes of Lebanon :
The faithless rule and keep their stand
In all the ports of holy land,
And fierce unchristened kings are set
Upon the sides of Olivet.
Take back, O continent of Mine,
Take back for Me My Palestine.”

Therefore, I saw the spears upon
Acre and wallèd Ajalon :
Therefore, I serve the Saracens,
Whose hearts are not as Frankish men's,
And captive am and slave therefore
Unto this heathen emperor.

Yet have I toiled to take again
The little cities of His pain,
To take the little cities striven,
Dear seed-plots of the Rose of Heaven.

THE NOON.

UPON the highlands of Arabia
Blue is the noon and full of pinions.

A phoenix sits upon a balsam-tree,
Preening his golden feathers in the sun.

Clear, dreadful, full of wings the sky, and sweet
The cool air singing through the balsam-trees.

Upon the hills the wind is beautiful
And floods the hollow highland like a wave.

There comes an angel out of Babylon,
Whose wings are bluer than the sapphire is.

He sings, he sings and walks the height alone
Upon the highlands of Arabia.

A myriad musics echo back his song,
And all the heaven is full of shrilling voices.

HEAVENLY GOTHIC.

A GREAT cloud overhung the darkening earth,
Enormous, shining white and wonderful.

From the dim splendours of the dying sun
Roses and gold it caught, and loveliest light.

And at an open window sat and gazed
A poor, sad, dreaming soul, most miserable.

Battered of earth, too weak to win its wars,
Yet a beholder of most subtle visions.

Upon the turret of the cloud stood Michael,
Clad all in purple, with a shining sword.

All trumpet-tongued to that poor fool he called :
“ Come up now to the High Cathedral of God,
Come up to the holy house of the great sun :
Lo, the foundations are the flame of the clouds,
And the arches are the prayers of the sunset,
And the song of it the choir of the evening ;
Stars are its windows and its walls are fire,
Built of the light of morning : enter thou ! ”

THE BALLAD OF OTMOOR.

(*For R. A. E. S.*)

A KING's daughter came riding by,
 Riding by, riding by,
A king's daughter came riding by
Under the simple arch of the sky,
 Over the marsh of Otmoor.

Bells were round her horse's neck,
 Her horse's neck, her horse's neck,
Bells were round her horse's neck;
On May Day morning came she by,
 Riding over Otmoor.

Her feet were shod with silver and gold,
 With silver and gold, with silver and gold;
She was crowned with silver and girt with gold
 Upon the marsh of Otmoor.

Her robes were dyed in the scarlet's red,
 In the scarlet's red, in the scarlet's red,
Blue were her eyes and her robes were red
 At dawn on Wednesday morning.

As she came by past Charlton tower,
 Past Charlton tower, past Charlton tower,
The fair dawn opened like a flower,
 A flower on Wednesday morning.

The smell of the dawn was the smell of a rose,
 The scent of a rose, the soul of a rose,
The smell of the dawn was the smell of a rose,
 As it opened over Otmoor.

The bells in Charlton tower rang high,
 The bells rang high, the bells rang high,
And her horse's bells, as she rode by,
 Over the marsh of Otmoor.

The people of Charlton knelt in the street,
 Low in the street, low in the street,
They bowed at the sound of her horse's feet,
They bent and bowed in the midst of the street,
 At dawn on Wednesday morning.

She smiled upon them and rode away,
 She rode away, she rode away,
She smiled upon them and galloped away
Into the blossoming birth of the day,
 At dawn on Wednesday morning.

HOC EST CORPUS MEUM.

THEY are gone hunting for Thy soul, O Lord,
Deep-diving down into time's endless wells :
Profounder than all sounds of chaunting and bells,
They have let slip their learning's lengthy cord.

One man will put Thee with the Greeks to school,
And many books they have written mighty and wise,
And one a prophet makes Thee with pale eyes,
And one a madman or a dreaming fool.

Yet still at certain times the steps are trod,
Yet still at certain times the words are said ;
Thou dost present Thyself to be our bread,
And we are nourished with the Body of God.

THE ABIDING BURG.

(Dedication : To the Small Towns of Christendom).

THERE lived a man before the altar-flame
Within the city of Mortality :
This was the high abode of crownèd shame,
And round it always roared the tyrant sea.
In slavery he lived, and evermore
The masters of the shrines, that held the rods,
Dragged him perforce behind their conquering cars,
And smote his body sore.
Long time he yearned to leave his violent gods,
Desiring to behold again the stars.

But in the end there came one to him robed
In stainless samite, girded with a sword,
Whose eyes with might and tenderness were globed,
The herald of an everlasting lord,
Which said, " I call thee to the place above
All streams that moan about the darkening world,
The Abiding City of the Infinite,
Whereto all galleons move,

Wherein all sails are laid away and furled,
The Eternal House above this lesser light.

This is the bourne that ends all wayfaring :
For I am Death, to whom the keys are given,
And I shall show thee this most marvellous thing,
Crowned with the milk-white pinnacles of Heaven,
The spiritual haven of the sun,
That has been and that shall be evermore,
The city everlasting, the high place
Not ended nor begun;
And thou shalt leave this lamentable shore,
Therein to cease from weary travelling-days."

Forthwith that herald led him to a ship,
From whose high mast a flag of gold flew free.
Into the shining hold the twain did slip,
And soon the galleon rode upon the sea,
Leaving Earth's darkest harbour far behind,
And the ports of desolation : for a time,
For many years and for the shadow of years,
They sped before the wind,
And yet it seemed the moment of a rhyme,
Gone like a whisper in forgetful ears.

The sands ran down for but a little hour
Within the hour-glass as they travelled on :

It was about the lifetime of a flower,
Born with the dews and perished with the sun.
A myriad million years they sailed along
The ocean that is called Eternity,
Unnumbered star-leagues from the shores of man,
Amid that broken throng,
Folk that were weary of mortality,
Desiring the Eternal House to scan.

The white sails swelled, the golden oars swept by,
While over the vast, infinite sea they came,
And low beneath the dawn they saw it lie,
The city builded from a single flame.
And up the harbour steps the voyager trod
Amid that sea-stained throng of mariners,
Passing before the thronèd monarch's seat,
The king whose name is God,
And in that city rid him of despairs,
Resting eternally his travelling feet.

VESPERS.

THE light is going away from the dear world :
It is all vanished with the sunken sun ;
Into long lines of rest the clouds are curled,
And slumber—all but one.

That, hung up-piled, shines over all its height
With loveliest gold and rose of softened fire,
Borrowing from the west unearthlier light,
As it mounts slowly higher.

Quietly like a dream the evening
Droops with its dim veils on the silent wood :
A few brown birds make deeper as they sing
The heavenly solitude.

Ah, blessèd dream ! surely I seem to see
How in Her place of light where no wind blows,
Shines in Her glorious virginity
The White and Mystic Rose.

Alas ! the darkness falls upon my vision,
And on the woods it falls, and on the lands ;
Yet, though the cities hold it in derision,
The City of Heaven stands.

THE SONG OF A SECRET LADY.

(*For K. C.*)

UNAUREOLED, unsainted,
She keeps her eyes untainted,
Her picture is unpainted,
 Her songs she sings unheard :
While in her house she walks
And smiles and prays and talks,
With every step she blesses,
Shakes incense from her tresses,
 Jewels from every word.

The souls of dear, dead roses
 Perfume her figured bowls :
The books she opens and closes
 Have roses for their souls :
Her lovely, lonely fingers
 Do seem composed for praise,
And beauty stirs and lingers
 Where'er she takes her ways.

The paths of peaceful places
 She hallows with her hands,

Sheds out her secret graces
On lawns and lanes and lands,
Makes beautiful her house
And happy all her trees,
Gardens of birds and bees,
Orchards and orchard-walls,
Is even as music played harmonious
Upon fair virginals,
Or creeping out from placid, faded keys.

Yea, as on virginals in some rich, ancient room,
A singing harmony is raised up on the air,
And like a lucent spear of opal through the gloom
Goes musical with benediction everywhere,
Even so the sweet soul of her is
Compact of various harmonies,
That all to one delicious tune are blent
Upon a curious-chorded instrument,
Nor ever is their store of music spent.

And, as on pale autumnal dawns
The subtle mists are spread across her lawns,
The vapour hangs in silver, droops and gleams,
So round her spirit falters
A veil of floating vision,
Dim worship of old altars,
Tissue of blessed dreams.

THE MASTER'S SLEEP.

THE master slept in lonely state,
Silent, still, supremely great,
 In a dim, enshrouded room,
 Black with terrible, full gloom :
The master's couch was rich and rare,
And a thick darkness brooded there.

The master lay asleep
In his white bed fair and deep,
 And his thin hand resting lay
 Beside him, and the candle's play
With its pale glow about the wick
But lit the silver candle-stick.

As the master slept, there came
A hand without a face or name :
 As the master slept, his cup
 With witches' poison fillèd up :
When the master woke, he died
And the red wine fell by his side.

The master sleeps beneath the sod
Near the yews of the yard of God :
 The mistress takes another spouse
 And the candles gleam about the house :
There is only a stain upon the floor,
Behind the master's fast-locked door.

THE UNSATISFIED.

THOSE that are fools and find the world a maze,
Who knows if they are right in their mad ways,
Who with amazed face in crowded roads
Walk dreaming of more permanent abodes ?

For them the cities are like ashes hurled
Across a cleaner vision of the world :
For them the engines are but childish toys,
And vast democracies a crowd of boys.

They in their hearts a cloistral chamber keep
Far from the myriad roarings hidden deep,
Where in a place most dim high hills there are,
Vast blueness and a white, unchanging star.

“ O fools and blind, by ruinous folly led,
Out, useless mouths,” the marching world has said :
They with wise eyes turn toward the unearthly sight,
Where summits sleep against the azure light.

THE NORTHERN MOUNTAIN.

THOU upon the withered heights, where the reed wails
in the wind,

Spreadest forth thy banner of cloud, shining over
earth and sea :

Purple climb the hills to heaven, frowns the soaring peak
behind—

Bend the brow and breathe the prayer, to the moun-
tain bow the knee.

God upon the heights thou rulest, and the gardens of
the dead

Under every solemn cairn feel the passing of the
rain :

Rushing roll the clouds of dawn, clouds that crown
a towering head,

Rushing come the streams of dawn, stainless from
the hills again.

Music of the upland winds and murmur of the upland
burn—

Throned upon the brooding crags, master of moun-
tains, dost thou sit:

Shines the heather robed in purple, drips the emerald
of the fern,

Soars the eagle, shrieks and soars, and the flower
hangs in the pit.

THE
GREAT QUEEN OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

(*For N. H.*)

MISTRESS and mother of all lovely things,
Thine are tremendous towers and painted words,
The spears of nobleness, the crowns of kings,
Banners of armies and bright blades of swords.

Thine are priests praying in strange, secret chapels,
Thine are archangels for thy vassalage,
And thine are orchards of enchanted apples :
Therefore I sing to thee, O Middle Age.

I.

And thou dost shun the noises of loud labours,
And choosest rather to love lonelinesses,
With foolish little children for thy neighbours,
O fairest of all ladies and princesses.

Yea, thou for whom the golden emperors died,
Who art brow-bound with beryl, far away
Dost deign to show the full face of thy pride,
If there be any that will kneel and pray.

II.

Where little, lonely towns of crowded towers
Sit dreaming in still peace behind the sun,
There goest thou forth amid the small field-flowers,
Showing thyself perchance to two or one.

The quiet of their creeping streets thou lovest,
Thy hands are often knocking at their doors,
Thy royal robes across their stones thou movest,
And thy fair feet go softly on their floors.

III.

Where ancient roofs of lowly red are set
About some pinnacled church's holy knees,
While in the dawn's dim rain they are shining wet,
And the smoke moves in the slow-swaying breeze;

Ah, there against the burning, brightening east,
While slowly from the æry belfry swells
Of all thy heart's great musics not the least,
The mellow crashing of singing, swaying bells;

Ah, there, while that star-storming tower aspires,
Gray stone above the town's old red and green,
Surely, across the morning's radiant fires,
Surely at that time are thy garments seen.

IV.

Where sweet, white violets perfume the bare hedges,
Low-lurking in the grasses by the roads,
There goest thou forth along the highway-edges,
And through the springing copses, thine abodes.

Thine are small churches amid quiet grasses,
Which have for windows thorny traceries
And glimmering panels of many-coloured glasses
And altars dedicated unto peace.

Thine are blue noons, and subtly-blossoming dawns,
And trees upon bare uplands writhen and bent,
And silent dancing-places of wide lawns,
And glades that still remember the tournament.

O thine, O thine the slow and sleeping rivers,
That are not troubled much by sail or oar,
Where nothing but the lapping water quivers,
And creeps about the soft sands of the shore.

V.

O magic are the long strands of thy hair;
A myriad-jewelled girdle clasps thee round;
All sweet, untrodden places are thy care,
And whatsoever is unresisted ground.

The glorious colours of thy bright robes shake
In very many solitary dales,
And thy strange eyes amid high hills awake,
When the white, trembling star of morning pales.

Ah! never mind, ah! never mind the towns;
For to thee in thy places of fair rest
Children are weaving delicate, bloomy crowns,
And little pages dance, in scarlet drest.

Most glorious princess, wheresoe'er thou art,
In highland fields, or in gray ruined choirs,
Or caverned chapels dear to thy wise heart,
Lit by dim tapers for their altar-fires,

My song is ended—give me grace therefore
Sometimes to see thee in thy lonely pride,
Sometimes to walk as thine ambassador,
Or watch the lilies blowing at thy side.

KINGCUP DAWN.

THE sky is dappled, the south is blue,
The fields are arrased with buds and stars,
Roll on the towering, dim cloud-cars,
And hardly dried is the dew.

The burning faces of great marsh-marigolds
Wink and blaze in the sun ;
May's first day is begun ;
The burning faces of great marsh-marigolds
Laugh in the face of the sun.

And thou, with the dew of the dawn about thee,
And the light of the dawn on thy hair,
And thy dear hands brimming with grace,
Art here, O most kind and most fair,
Art here, O dawn of my Mays,
Thou sun of my dawns and my days,
With a crown of blossom about thee,
And a blossom of light on thy face.

THE AZURE MARSH.

*Ah, lotus infinite, ah, wild, sweet blue,
Sense, in thine azure ocean dipped, must die !*

A DRAUGHT OF THE BLUE.

Now Otmoor is one veil of gentian,
And subtly-creeping winds just stir the trees ;
Surely never, since mortal night began,
Were such dim melodies.

Cerulean distance, delicate poplar-spires
That wave upon the dying light of day—
Behind the tower the sunset's sombre fires
Slow-fading die away.

Around the village like the opening heart
Of some night-odorous, heavenly-petalled flower,
The circle of the low hills draws apart,
And dreams at the quiet hour.

NAFFORD UNDER BREDON.

By Nafford mill there is clear water ;
Trees there are and tender grasses ;
The virgin peace, contentment's daughter,
 Over the bridges passes.

Fair child of contemplation and content,
She strikes the slow strings of her instrument,
 And subtly makes to be
 Pervading harmony.

By Nafford mill peace walks,
Contentment's virgin daughter,
And to her children talks
Beside the churning water ;
Most magic secret tells,
Where the weir floods and swells.

Behind, the towering crest of Bredon,
The walled mass of the hill, arises
Over that dear and secret Eden,
 That place of sweet surprises.

D

Between the thin fronds of the branches
Like smoke the high ridge stands and dreams :
 Out of its thick trees launches
 More magic than first seems.

If any desire to behold our lady peace,
Then let them to still Nafford wander away :
For there beneath the calm, blue eyes of day
 She sings, nor ever cease
 Her rippling melodies.

THE DESCENT OF THE DREAMER.

UNBAR the gates of sleep and let him through :
For he has drunk all day of things divine,

 The winds, whose soul is wine,
The rapturous dawn, the redolence of the dew,
The breathless quiet of the still mid-noon,
The frankincense of the mysterious flowers,
The orange flush of evening in the west,
 And thou, O serene moon,
After the radiant pomp of the long hours,
Kindling an argent torch, which tells of rest.

And he has heard sweet music all the day,
The whispering of the wind among the trees,
 And, seeking the far seas,
The murmur of the river on its way ;
The harmonies of birds, whose song smites deep
As stars shivering dark water in a well,
Birds throned in holy silence of the suns.

 Ah, the high porch of sleep,
And meadows clothed in dreaming asphodel ;
Towards the doors with eager feet he runs.

D 2

And he has seen around the sundial
The shapes of faëry flow with linkèd fingers ;
 Yet in his spirit lingers
The sound of their faint music magical.
The last light comes from blue hills far away ;
Open the towering doors and let him in,
Into thy lands, O dim and sovran sleep,
 Into thy secret sway,
Where the whole world is full of irised din,
And with dumb poppy-petals' swathèd deep.

Lo, on his hair a rainbow for a crown,
A lily in his fingers for a wand
 To guide his trembling hand
In the long ways, where roads of fear go down,
Where mountains hide their peaks amid the stars,
And in black gulfs below their roots are fast,
Circling about the eternal gates of hell.
 In dragon-pinioned cars
Phantoms of dreams along the ways are cast,
High-crowned with power, divine, imperishable.

Yea, in sleep's kingdom there are many things,
Which no mind knows, of which no tongue can tell,
 Grievous and terrible,
As notes of an enchanter's pipe-playings.

The flushing sunset of the vanished earth
Fades to wan fires across the vales of sleep,
And fills the eyes of all therein with flame;
 And in a shivering birth
Forth from the depth of secret caves there creep
Creatures too strange to live and bear a name.

Soon shall he see the torches of dead years
Go gliding on along the paths of thee,
 Veiled shape of fantasy,
And winged woes drifting in a rout of fears:
Soon with glad, shining eyes and outstretched hands
Move on with feet of darkness, seeking ever
Dales of a magic moon-dawn, fierce and free,
 The unknown outer lands,
The long, low sob of the last, loneliest river,
The silence of the everlasting sea.

TO H. B.

O THOU that from vast Margeride did'st see
The rivers of Europe and her isles extended,
Her vales, her waters and lands and promontories,
Her myriad-minded companies of cities,
And the eternal light on ageless Rome.

O thou to whom are dear
Great horses, and the crested foam of waves,
And boats that break the floods of the seas of spring,
And the southern vales made magical with flowers;
The antique arches of wise, crumbling towns,
Battles and wine and the stories of those armies,
That smote the kings with the sword revolutionary :
And lastly, all altars lit for adoration,
A vision upon the hills, a dream at dawn,
The unceasing chaunts of immemorial faith,
The uplifted shining of sacramental things.

Hilaire, presenting to us,
Even to the Europeans that have forgotten,

The loud fame of the march of our histories,
The face of Roland and the arms of Gaul,
The bishops that did not fear the barbarians,
The hosts unterrified in the unhallowed east,
And the princes riding into Jerusalem.

Presenting also to us with irony
Those exiled children of Jerusalem,
Who have sold their souls for the gold of the continents.

Let not this world of the roaring wheels dismay thee,
Nor the minds whose wisdom is the child of gloom,
Nor the hands that play the traitor to the hearts,
Nor the pageant of our hopeless questionings :
But still do thou present
The changeless frame of immemorial earth,
The abiding call of sempiternal hopes,
And that celestial country permanent,
Whereto move all the tribes of human kind,
And shall one day have rest.

HELIASTER.

I LIFT my hands to thee, O large and golden lord,
Uplift my hands to thee, upraise on high my soul ;
All bloom of solemn light, thy great lamp doth afford,
Shines full and covers me ; thy tides upon me roll.
For all desire that reigns, the blue day but begun,
I lift my hands, O sun.

The strange and darkened world that labours far away—
Look down on it, O lord : for it I bow the knee.
For all the world of men I kneel, a youth, and pray ;
For cities starven and seared, for shoaling leagues of sea,
For children bred in pain and women sorrowing,
I kneel to thee, O king.

Young am I, yea, and lithe with strange, sweet oil of
dreams,
And lo, to thee I come from caverns full of night.
A drop of thrilling dew, the earth shakes in thy beams ;
Thy influence wraps me round and robes my limbs in
light ;

Clear-eyed I offer up on this green, glistening lawn
Thy sacrament, O dawn.

So with my arms outstretched, and hair afire, and face
A rose of happy flame, and strange songs in my ears,
O lord, I worship thee, entreating power and grace,
Entreating strength of thee, O king amid the spheres.
A youth that kneels and prays, the blue day but begun,
I worship thee, O sun.

THE BALLAD OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE.

IN a little grove of singing birds,
On a glimmering dawn of May,
I met with Love's ambassador
Standing across my way,
On a glimmering dawn of May,
In a little grove of hazel-trees,
In the midst of the noise of singing birds
At the first hour of the day.

His eyes were bluer than the sea,
His hair was like the sun,
His robe was woven of cramasy,
Flowered with vermillion :
A crown of gold was on his head,
Whose rays made bright the land ;
A mirror of shining silver
Gleamed in his fair, right hand.
His brow was garlanded over
With apple-flowers and white clover
And honey-bearing blossom.

His left hand held an hour-glass,
And shook the ruddy sand.
The dawn-light played all over
His fingers and his bosom :
His wings had azure feathers
And moved not in the sun,
When Love's ambassador met me,
At a time of dreaming weathers,
Clad in vermilion.

Around his head the singing birds
Were piping merrily,
Yea, did the little wingèd fowls
Carol from every tree,
Chaffinch, robin and nightingale,
Blackbird, mavis and nightingale
Chaunted on every spray,
In a little grove of hazel-trees,
At the first hour of the day.

About his fine and rosy feet,
In soft grass dim with showers,
Sprang vermeil blossoms and silvery buds
And delicate, starry flowers :
The cowslips breathed in the wind of spring,
The daffodils danced and shone,

She swayed with her bells like a warrior-thing,
The helmèd martagon ;
The jonquils glimmered, the violets burned,
Purple, milky and blue,
And the childish choirs of primroses turned
Their faces up from the dew.

All kinds of roses tangled and took
The light of the sun in their eyes ;
Cerulean hyacinths smiling shook
Amid barred fritillaries ;
The virginal windflowers nodded around him,
The daisies laughed in the grass,
The sloe and the hawthorn were piled around him,
The great white lilies were thick around him ;
The great white lilies, the pale wood-lilies
Were queens enthroned in the grass.

And to me did the winged ambassador
Open his angel mouth ;
The enchanted words came flying forth
Like fair doves out of the south.

Lover, said he, the master of Love,
Whose messenger am I,
Bids thee to join his festival
And enjoy felicity.

For on all pretty May mornings
His custom so it is
To gather together his vavasours
To the house of Blanchelys,
To spend the hours with dancing
Amid many jollities.
The master of Love, thou lover,
Bids thee be one of these.

With a happy voice of singing
I followed to the door
Of the house of Blanchelys
King Love's ambassador.
Behind his treading feet
Blossomed the broods of spring;
About his head of roses
I heard the sweet birds sing;
The colours of all the rainbows
Shone on each azure wing.

It was on that May morning
I came to the place of bliss,
And found my lovely lady
In the house of Blanchelys.

DREAM-COTSWOLD.

I.

THY little dreaming towns life passes by,
They fade and waste, I know, regretfully,
Their chief inhabiter antiquity.

Their wealth is gone, their folk's best part is dead,
They mourn alone nor can be comforted,
Silence and sleepy days weigh down each head.

Yet, O thou dear, blue region of high air,
I look upon thy towns without despair,
For in my dreams thou still art royally fair.

II.

O magic and serenely set, in dreams
I hear loud music from thy secret streams,
Each little city on Cotswold sings and gleams.

Now Ciceter lifts up her fair, crowned face,
Now is she robed in honour and clad with grace.
Wide cloaks of scarlet blow about the place,

Dear queen of Cotswold and the upland earth,
She is returned once more to riches and mirth,
She is returned once more to the pride of her birth.

Now Campden wakes, and laughter fills her ways,
And Northleach is a queen of arising days,
And Burford blows, a blossom of ancient praise.

Now laughs the windy place on the high wold,
And Stow is magic as she was of old,
And Stow is filled with merchants clad in gold.

March Moreton and Hill Bourton now put on
Lost garments of the glory that is gone,
And Water Bourton takes a happier throne.

III.

Yea, yea, the little gray towns are glad again,
They have put aside the memories of their pain,
They assume the sceptres and begin to reign.

The pasturing hills and hill-sides beautiful
Grow fat once more, and seem to be made full
Of shepherds and bleating flocks and bales of wool.

The flowery vales are filled with shepherd-throngs,
The greens of remotest villages glad with songs,
And all that to felicity belongs.

The inns are happy and the long roads gay,
The great clouds march upon their towering way,
Blue Cotswold is one hill of holiday.

The dream is strong: soon will I breast the hill,
Pluck violets and the waving daffodil,
With petals of primroses my fingers fill;

And visit each by turn the laughing towns—
Ah no, the light grows dim, the vision drowns;
Not mine to see them robed and wearing crowns.

IV.

Ah no, the light grows dim—the far blues fade,
The great hills melt into a moving shade,
Down in their ancient sleep the towns are laid.

So when I see thee next and walk thy streets,
Tasting the pleasure of thy silent sweets,
Plucking the dim blooms of thy hid retreats,

I shall not, as the dream was showing thee,
Behold thy towns in their felicity:
Nay, in their agèd slumber will they be.

V.

Only in dreams to those that seek, appears

Dream-Cotswold, loosed from the devouring years,
Appareled finely, having forgotten tears.

In dreams strange music is the robe of her,
The towns are stronger, greater and lovelier,
Earth is no vestment for their roads to wear :

Moreton, Bourton and Stow, March, Water and Wold,
Where none grow weary at all and none grow old,
Where the trees have emerald leaves and the streets are
gold.

THE ENVOY.

The scene is a lonely road before sunset, and there the Traveller
meets the Solitary Woman on the crest of the hill.

THE TRAVELLER.

*O THOU, that standest by the lonely road,
Upon the bare hill's crown,
Tell me this,
How may I to Dream-Cotswold come,
How find the Little Town ?*

THE SOLITARY WOMAN.

*I do not know.
Traveller, traveller, walking alone,
Listen now to the words I shall say
From the mouth of a prince in Palestine
Thousands of years away.*

*If any there are that seek, they shall find,
If any knock, they shall enter in ;*

*But what they seek is not shown to the blind,
Nor shall they enter that knock in sin.*

I do not know.

*But somewhere far beyond this hill
Dream-Cotswold floats in sacred blue,
And the happy vales are still.*

*Somewhere beyond this hill
The Little Town stands high with many a spire,
The roofs shine in strange fire,
The chimes are magical ;
There is no crying nor any sorrow at all.*

Walk on.

*Thou shalt not find these places yet.
Thou hast not toiled enough, O traveller,
Thou art not stained with the road, O traveller,
Thou art not cleansed from thy stains, O traveller,
Nor opened are thy eyes.*

Walk on.

*At the last time of all,
When thou art broken with great journeying,
And at the end of all thy power to move,
And the earth faints away,*

*Then shalt thou hear the golden children singing
About the high streets of the Little Town,
And lifting up her azure crown
Dream-Cotswold's bells shall greet thee, sweetly ringing.*

The Traveller passes away into the night. The Solitary Woman stands outlined against the sunset, gazing upon the infinite plain.

THE END.

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